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AUTHOR Levine, Karen S.; Hennessy, James J.
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ABSTRACT

Previous research has suggested that similarities and differences in specific personality factors are associated with differences in marital stability. Most findings were based on assessments of personality after marriage, thus confounding the effects of marriage on personality. This study was conducted to examine congruence between spouses' personality assessed prior to marriage with the status of the marriage after 3 to 5 years of marriage. Subjects were 72 couples between the ages of 16 and 19 who were referred to a church-affiliated counseling agency prior to obtaining permission from that church to marry. Each partner completed the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) prior to obtaining permission to marry. Seven of the 16 personality dimensions of the 16PF have been identified as being predictive of marital status: sizothymia/affectothymia, intelligence, ego weakness/strength, submissiveness/dominance. desurgency/surgency, alaxia/protension, and conservatism/radicalism. These seven dimensions were examined using intraclass and multivariate analyses. The findings clearly suggest a relation between personality assessed prior to marriage and marital instability. Spouses in marriages characterized as stable tended to be similar in intelligence, protension, and radicalism. Spouses in unstable marriages differed in warmth and outgoingness, while being similar in intelligence. (Author/NB)

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# Personality Influences in Teenage Marital Stability

Karen S. Levine

Family Consultation Services, New York

James J. Hennessy

Fordham University

C6022187

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# Marital Stability and Personality Congruence In Teenage Marriages

## Abstract

Previous research indicated that similarities and differences in specific personality factors are associated with differences in marital stability. Most findings were based on assessments of personality after marriage, thus confounding the effects of marriage on personality. The findings reported here relate congruence between spouses' personality assessed prior to marriage with the status of the marriage 3-5 years after marriage. Each partner in a group of 72 teenage couples completed the 16PF prior to obtaining approval to marry. These data were examined using intraclass and multivariate analyses. The findings indicated that hypothesized patterns of personality factors differentiated stable from unstable marriages.

## Marital Stability and Personality Congruence In Teenage Marriages

Thousands of teenagers marry each year in the United States. Those marriages are more common occurrences in the United States than in any other country in the industrialized world (Bahr, Chappell, & Leigh, 1983; Demographic Yearbook, 1983). Concern about teenage marriages focuses on the stability of these unions and whether or not they are more likely to end in divorce than marriages contracted at older ages.

One of the most recurring findings in family research has been that of a strong positive relation between age at marriage and marital stability (Glenn & Supanicic, 1984, Kitson, Babri, & Roach, 1985), whether the latter is defined in terms of marital maladjustment (Burchinal, 1959), disruption (Bumpass & Sweet, 1970), perceived dissatisfaction (Lacey, 1984) or divorce or dissolution (Boothe & Edwards, 1985). A United States Census Bureau sample of couples married in 1982, in which the incidence of divorce during the first two years was ascertained, found that the probability of divorce early in the marriage was nearly 4 times as high for couples married while still under 20 years than for couples who were 25 or older at the time of marriage (Current Population Reports, 1984; Statistical Abstract, 1985).

Although most studies reported that the social consequences of

teenage marriages include greater risks of separation or divorce, more discord, and lower satisfaction than is found in marriages occurring after age 25, there are teenage marriages that remain intact. The present study sought to determine if congruence of specific personality characteristics accounted for differences in stability of teenage marriages.

Past research examining the correlates of marital adjustment proceeded from the assumption that variations in stable personality characteristics assessed in both partners either before or after marriage accounted for a significant proportion of variability in happiness, satisfaction, and stability. Studies such as those by Terman and Oden (1947), Winch (1955), Banta and Hetherington (1963), and Cattell and Nesselroade (1967) reported that patterns of specific personality patterns differentiated successful from less successful marriages, when success was conceptualized in terms of either satisfaction or stability. For example, in the classic study by Terman and Oden (1947), six characteristics, pessimism, touchiness, domination, insensitivity toward others, self-confidence, and self-sufficiency were correlated substantially with measures of marital happiness for both husbands and wives. Although the authors concluded that personality factors were the strongest predictors of the quality of marriage, their findings are limited by not fewer than two

confounds: (1) no attempt was made to examine within-couple similarities and differences on the measures, precluding any understanding of the effects of heterogamy/homogamy (likes appealing to or repelling one another); and (2) assessments were completed after marriage, thus preventing any strong test of the effects of preexisting personality differences on marital outcome.

Those studies in which intra-couple comparisons were made (eg. Banta & Hetherington, 1963; Katz, Glucksberg, & Krauss, 1960; and Winch, 1955) generally found that similarity on some factors (eg. intelligence, maturity, warm-heartedness) and differences on others (eg. dominance and radicalism) were predictive of outcome. Again, however, those findings are limited, in most instances, to comparisons based on post-marriage personality assessments leaving unanswerable questions regarding the influence of those factors in mate selection and later stability.

The present study attempted to overcome the limitations of earlier studies by considering only personality data that were obtained prior to marriage, and by examining relationships only on those personality variables that in past research were found consistently to be associated with marital stability. Those variables were assertiveness, intelligence, maturity, open-mindedness, optimism, suspiciousness, and warm-heartedness. On

the basis of past findings, it was hypothesized that spouses would differ from one another on measures of assertiveness, open-mindedness, and suspiciousness, and would be similar to each other on intelligence, maturity, optimism, and warm-heartedness. It was also hypothesized that the pattern of scores on those measures would differentiate stable from unstable marriages more so than would any one measure by itself.

## Method

### Subjects

The subjects were 72 nonrandomly-selected couples who had been referred to a church-affiliated counseling agency prior to obtaining permission from that church to marry. Both members of all couples were between the ages of 16 and 19 at the time of referral; they were required to undergo a psychological evaluation intended to assess emotional maturity and readiness for marriage. These couples represented all but 8 couples referred to the agency during a two-year period in the early 1980's. Four of the eight couples not included did not subsequently marry and four could not be reached for follow-up determination of marital status. All participants had completed three or more years of high school at the time of testing, resided in New York City, and were described on intake forms as being Caucasian.

In 1987 the first author contacted one or the other spouse, or a family member if neither spouse could be reached, to inquire about

current status. After explaining the purpose of the contact, the investigator asked whether or not the couple was still married, had separated or divorced, or indeed ever married as earlier planned. Usable responses were obtained from 72 of the original pool of 80 couples.

Materials

As part of the pre-marriage assessment each partner completed the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF, Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970) which is a factor-analytically developed inventory of 16 major dimensions of personality. Of those 16, seven have been identified in past research as being predictive of marital status (Cattell & Nesselroade, 1967); scores on those seven dimensions for all subjects were included in the present study. The seven scales were:

Sizothymia/affectothymia (Factor A) which is a measure of warmth and outgoingness at one pole, and of coolness and aloofness at the other.

Intelligence (Factor B) which is a measure of concreteness and dullness in thinking at one pole, and of insightfulness and brightness at the other.

Ego Weakness/Strength (Factor C) which is a measure of emotional stability and maturity at one pole and of irritability and lability at the other.

Submissiveness/Dominance (Factor E) which is a measure of assertiveness, independence, and competitiveness at one pole, and of obedience, conformity, and submissiveness at the other. Desurgency/Surgency (Factor F) which measures enthusiasm and elan at one pole, and seriousness and somberness at the other. Alaxia/Protension (Factor L) which is a measure of suspiciousness and jealousy at one pole, and of trust and acceptance at the other. Conservatism/Radicalism (Factor $Q_1$) which is a measure of cautiousness and adherence to traditional mores at one pole, and of liberalism and experimenting at the other.

Data Analyses

Intraclass correlation coefficients were computed to test the relationship between individual personality factors for a group comprised of those still married and a group made up of couples who were divorced or separated at the time of follow-up. The primary purpose of these analyses was to determine whether or not the two contrast groups differed with respect to the direction and magnitude of the correlations between the scores of partners on the seven measures. The intraclass coefficient was deemed more appropriate than a Pearson product-moment coefficient because the intraclass coefficient reflects similarity in both rank and strength or magnitude of performance (it is sensitive to mean

differences as well as relative standing). According to Willerman (1979) the intraclass correlation is the preferred indicator of agreement of scores across either time for the same person, or between two people who are presumed to be drawn from a sample having equal means and variances, as was hypothesized for spouses in the two stability groups.

The vectors of 16PF scores for all couples were then subjected to a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The unit of analysis was the dyad, with each spouse's scores treated as a repeated measure; the grouping factor was Stability, categorized as Stable (still married at follow-up) and Unstable (no longer residing together). This design was deemed most appropriate to a test of profile similarity within couples and between stability groups.

## Results

Means and standard deviations for each of the seven 16PF variables are reported in Table 1; the values are reported separately for

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Insert table 1 here

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the Stable and Unstable groups and for husbands and wives within those groups. As can be seen in that table, 46 of the 72 couples were still married at the time of follow-up, while only 26 couples

were no longer residing together. The high proportion of stable marriages is greater than those reported in other studies, reflecting, perhaps, the religiosity of the sample. The experience of undergoing institutional scrutiny also may have influenced the stability of the marriages. Most mean values were higher than the means for the normative samples (5), except for men in the Stable group on Factors C, E, and $Q_1$ (emotional immaturity, shyness, and conservatism) and women in the Unstable group on Factors A and B (Aloofness and Intelligence). Two-way analyses of variance, reported in Table 2, computed on these

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Insert table 2 here

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variables found a significant difference between sexes on Factor A (affect) with men scoring higher, and on Factor C (ego strength) with women scoring higher. There were no other significant differences at the univariate level between spouses in either stability group.

The intraclass correlations are reported in Table 1. The correlation between spouses' scores was -.47 in the Unstable group($p<.01$) indicating that spouses in that group tended to be opposite one another in pre-marital warmth and outgoingness. A significant correlations also found in this group for Factor B

(intelligence), indicating a tendency toward similarity on that characteristic in the unstable, as well as the stable, group. No other personality factors were correlated significantly between spouses in the Unstable group.

The intraclass correlations in the Stable group were significant for Factors B, L, and $Q_1$ indicating that stable couples tended to be similar in intelligence, radicalism/conservatism, and trust/jealousy. Intelligence appeared to be an important factor in mate selection, but did not differentiate stability at follow-up. Its importance seems more in choice of spouse then in satisfaction with the marriage.

A repeated-measures MANOVA was computed to examine the similarity of vectors or profiles for the two groups. The main effects in the analysis were between-Stability groups and Sex, which in this analysis served as the replicated variable. The interaction of Stability x Sex was also examined. The results yielded a significant exact $F(7/64)$ of 2.45 ($p<.03$) for Stability and an $F(7/64)$ of 2.28 ($p<.04$) for Sex. The interaction of Stability x Sex test was not significant. These findings indicate that stably married couples differed from unstably married ones when personality was considered as a complex, multivariate variable, and that women differed from men at that same level of analysis. The within-dyad differences did not differentiate the stable from unstable couples, leading to the conclusion that the hypothesized configurations of similarities and differences were not found.

## Discussion

Clearly there is a relation between personality assessed prior to marriage and marital stability. In general, the findings indicate that spouses in marriages characterized as stable tended to be similar in intelligence, protension, and radicalism. Spouses in unstable marriages differed in warmth and outgoingness, while being similar in intelligence. These characteristics appear to play an important role in the success of marriage, with Intelligence apparently influencing choice of spouse more than stability.

Evidence for the theory that marital stability is related to complementarity of personality and needs is weaker than suggested by Winch (1955). Likewise the theory postulating personality similarity, or homogamy, was not affirmed strongly in these findings. A major weakness of complementarity is that it offers little explanation as to how, or whether, the need or personality structures of two individuals, considered separately, constitutes a basic factor in mate selection. Both that model and homogamy have heuristic value, however, and have stimulated research that seeks to understand better the marital relationship. Yet it is still the case that most of the variance associated with stability remains unexplained. The findings of this study demonstrate that stability is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that can not be explained by any unidimensional theories.

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Table 1

Means, standard deviations and intraclass correlation coefficients for all groups on the seven 16PF scales, (n=72 couples)

| | Marital Status | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stable n=46 | Unstable n=26 | Total n=72 | Stable n=46 | Unstable n=26 | Total n=72 |
| | 16PF A | | | 16PF B | | |
| M men | 5.8 | 5.7 | 5.8 | 5.6 | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| SD | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.6 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 2.0 |
| M women | 5.5 | 4.7 | 5.2 | 5.9 | 4.9 | 5.5 |
| SD | 1.9 | 1.8 | 1.9 | 1.6 | 1.9 | 1.8 |
| Intraclass | .05 | -.47 | | .38 | .45 | |
| | 16PF C | | | 16PF E | | |
| M men | 4.9 | 5.5 | 5.2 | 4.9 | 5.4 | 5.1 |
| SD | 1.8 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 1.7 | 1.9 | 1.8 |
| M women | 5.7 | 5.7 | 6.1 | 5.5 | 5.3 | 5.4 |
| SD | 2.2 | 2.0 | 1.8 | 1.7 | 1.9 | 1.8 |
| Intraclass | .24 | .13 | | -.02 | -.02 | |

(Table 1 continued)

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 16PF F | | | 16PF L | |
| M men | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 6.0 | 6.2 | 6.0 |
| SD | 1.8 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 2.3 | 2.0 |
| M women | 5.3 | 6.4 | 5.7 | 5.8 | 5.9 | 5.8 |
| SD | 2.0 | 2.0 | 2.1 | 2.2 | 1.8 | 2.1 |
| Intraclass | .12 | .28 | | .48 | .12 | |
| | | 16PF $Q_1$ | | | | |
| M men | 4.6 | 5.5 | 4.9 | | | |
| SD | 1.9 | 2.0 | 2.0 | | | |
| M women | 5.2 | 5.5 | 5.3 | | | |
| SD | 1.5 | 1.8 | 1.6 | | | |
| Intraclass | .34 | .24 | | | | |

Table 2

Two-Way Analyses of Variance F-Ratios for the Seven 16PF Scales

| | 16PF Scales | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A | B | C | E | F | L | $Q_1$ |
| Source | | | | | | | |
| Marital Status | 2.9 | 1.9 | .04 | .08 | 2.7 | 2.8 | 2.7 |
| Sex | 5.2* | 8.6** | 8.5** | .65 | 1.3 | .24 | 1.5 |
| Sex x Status | 1.4 | 2.8 | 3.2 | 1.4 | 3.4 | .89 | 1.5 |

*$p<.05$ **$p<.01$